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ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6480
INFO RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 3777
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 2723
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 0154
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS 3903
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 4025
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 3613
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 0023
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1560
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 000118

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/04/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [KPAL](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [SA](#)
SUBJECT: GEAGEA ON MARCH 14 POSITIVE MOMENTUM, CONCERNS
ABOUT SYRIAN INFLUENCE

REF: BEIRUT 65

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The March 14 coalition has recaptured some of its momentum as it prepares to commemorate the fifth anniversary of Rafik Hariri's assassination on February 14, Lebanese Forces (LF) leader Samir Geagea told the Ambassador on February 3. Geagea complained of Syria's ascendant status in Lebanon as evidenced, he alleged, by recent Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) harassment of LF political operatives and by Syrian intelligence activity among the Palestinian population. Geagea claimed that Syria was trying to recruit Palestinian fighters to revive the Baathist militant group al-Sai'qa in Lebanon's Palestinian refugee camps. End summary.

MARCH 14 UNIFIED BEFORE HARIRI COMMEMORATION

¶2. (C) The January 31 gathering of the March 14 coalition at Beirut's Bristol Hotel to announce plans for a commemoration on February 14 of former PM Rafik Hariri's assassination sent a strong, positive signal to both its constituency and "the opposition," Geagea told the Ambassador. Geagea expected the February 14 event to be a mass rally with speeches from PM Hariri, Kataeb head Amine Gemayel, former PM Fouad Siniora, and himself, among others. Walid Jumblatt might be advised not to come, Geagea explained, since the March 14 rank and file might boo him if he appears on stage. Despite Jumblatt's exit from March 14, Geagea described Hariri and his relationship with Jumblatt as "considerate and polite." Geagea reported that members of the opposition had asked Hariri about attending the commemoration, but only if he assured them that the speeches would be "acceptable to them," which Geagea claimed Hariri had refused to do. Even so, Geagea expected at least token representation from Berri's Amal and Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement, although he pointedly excluded the possibility of Hizballah sending anyone.

MARCH 14 MONEY WOES?

¶3. (C) Just before meeting the Ambassador, Geagea attended the regular weekly meeting of the March 14 Secretariat, his first such attendance in months. This, along with the Bristol meeting, which PM Hariri also attended, proved the continued relevance of the Secretariat and yielded positive

public optics for the movement, Geagea assessed. Echoing other members of March 14, Geagea complained about the money woes of the movement, which he said had hit Hariri's own Sunni supporters in the Future Movement particularly hard. Geagea alleged that Hariri's Future TV is months behind on its payroll and that Hariri had engaged a new public relations firm for the February 14 event because he owes "millions" to the previous PR outfit.

CONCERNS ABOUT SYRIAN INFLUENCE

14. (C) Geagea said he met with Hariri that day to protest harassment of LF members by the LAF's G-2 intelligence services, a development which he described as part of a wider pattern of growing Syrian influence in Lebanon. The current LAF leadership, in particular G-2 deputy General Abbas Ibrahim, Geagea claimed, is "to the liking of Syria and Hizballah." He characterized G-2 head Edmond Fadel as weak. Defense Minister Elias Murr has little influence compared to Syria, which is "giving orders to the LAF," Geagea opined.

15. (C) This reassertion of a Syrian role extends, Geagea assessed, to the Palestinian refugee camps and Palestinian military bases in Lebanon. He claimed that Syria is trying to recruit Palestinian fighters to revive the Palestinian Baathist militant group, as-Sai'qa, in order to regroup "their" Palestinians into an organization they fully control.

Such Syrian moves are possible, Geagea claimed, because of growing Syrian sway with the Saudis, who are less sophisticated on Lebanese issues. "(Syrian President Bashar) al-Asad has a direct line to Riyadh and from Riyadh to

Saad...on even the smallest details," he reported. Geagea urged that the U.S. raise these matters with the Saudis in both Washington and Riyadh.

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